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ABSTRACT

An examination of recent literature concerning differing male and female socializations reveals a number of implications and suggestions for changing some negative executive attitudes regarding female executive skills. While more women are in executive positions than ever before, women are still at a disadvantage because the productive interpersonal skills that are part of their socialization are not highly valued in the workplace, and they need additional safeguards against sexual harassment. Specific suggestions for remedies to problems of inappropriate power perceptions in organizations include the following: (1) training programs with the goal of consciousness raising (awareness) of the problems of power perceptions in the specific organizations; (2) employment analysis of firms' hiring, placement, and advancement policies focusing upon comparative worth data for each management and executive position; (3) intentional mentoring programs by the organization and networking efforts by male and female manager/executive candidates; (4) having intermediate range divisional goals to increase the number of managerial/executive women integrated into the organization and periodic reviews of the target objectives; and (5) skills training for all manager/executive career development personnel in the organization focusing upon skills shown to relate to effective human relations and conflict management. (EL)

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SEX AND POWER IN THE OFFICE: AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER AND EXECUTIVE POWER PERCEPTIONS IN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I present an examination of some of the recent literature concerning differing male and female socializations, especially concerning women executives. The paper provides some implications and suggestions for changing some negative executive attitudes regarding female executive skills.

Many skills natural in normal female socialization are shown to be essential in effective management leadership at the highest levels in business, government, industry, and education.

INTRODUCTION

Herman Kahn, a noted futurist, was asked how long it would be before 25 percent of the chief executives of Fortune 500 companies were women. Kahn is said to have replied, "About two thousand years, but make it 10 percent and I'll say within twenty years" (cited by Robertson, 1978).

Unfortunately, it appears progress has not been more rapid than he predicted. The trends are, however, favorable. More women are now in executive positions that ever before and even more are to be expected. According to Forbes and Piercy in their article entitled 'Rising to the Top: Executive Women in 1983 and Beyond," the number of women within management in general and within the upper echelon of the heirarchy in all sizes of industry and service firms is increasing" (Forbes & Piercy, 1983).

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, between 1972 and 1980, the number of female managers and executives at the administration level more than doubled (1,410,000 to 2,852,000) (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1980).

Heidrick and Stuggles, Inc., an executive research firm, reported that females at the officer rank in America's largest firms went up from 325 in 1977 to 497 in 1980, a 53-percent increase (Heidrick & Stuggles, Inc., 1980).

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Wakefield found that as many as 2.3 percent of administrators were females, a doubling of numbers happening between 1978 and 1983 (Wakefield, 1983). Recognizing these trends punctuates the need for organizations to consider how best they can prepare to use fully the many talents that female executives represent now and will represent in the near future.

In this paper I intend (1) to examine some of the literature concerning differing male and female socializations and executive women in particular, and (2) to offer some modest suggestions as to general directions executive attitudes ought to move in order to encourage full participation of female talent in the modern corporate office.

THE LITERATURE

As generalizations go, it is easy to find writers perpetuating statements such as "The man is active, articulate, and usually successful in his work, but he is inactive, inarticulate, lethargic and withdrawn at home" (Monell, 1980). Women are pictured, traditionally, as the nurturers, the supporters, and the domestic diplomats--the ones who ensure that emotional needs are being met and that conflicts are kept to a minimum. One speaker at a Women's Week dinner, with apparent irony, presented a list of how to tell a businessman from a businesswoman:

He's aggressive	She's pushy
He's good at details	She's picky
He loses his temper--being involved in his job	She's bitchy
He's depressed	She's "moody" today, it must be her time of the month
He follows through	She doesn't know when to quit
He is a man of the world	She's been "around"
He isn't afraid to say what he thinks	She's mouthy
He exercises authority	She's bossy
He climbed the ladder	She "slept" her way or affirmative action did it for her
He's confident	She's conceited
He drinks because of work pressure	She's a lush
He's enthusiastic	She's emotional

(See Rosenkrantz et al., 1968.)

Women are pictured in a Catch-22. If they get an executive position, they are perceived by some as "tokens." Tokens may feel the pressure to be twice as good as their male counterparts in order to prove themselves. The pressure of constant scrutiny (or imagined scrutiny) creates fear of making mistakes. Women may be afraid of delegating duties under such perceived pressure. This would mean giving up control over any mistakes, and the potential for more blame is present.

Male children are without doubt nurtured differently from females. Self-confidence, independence, assertion, and risk-taking are behaviors nurtured in American male children. Females, allegedly, are prepared for their goals of "getting a husband." So it is small wonder that, given this programming, women might have some difficulty adapting to power in the office. Tersa Donati Marciano in her article "Socialization and Women at Work" published in National Forum wrote:

> . . . the center of gravity in the socialization of boys is the desire for self gratification, while that of girls is the desire to gratify others. This has consequences for every area of later life including areas regarded as "traditionally female." (Marciano, 1981)

She concludes:

> Given this differential socialization by sex and given career structures which already have been shaped by male-oriented values, women start disadvantaged. Their socialization in effect "handicaps" them in terms of competition, assertiveness, and "winning" (Marciano, 1981).

The term "handicap" should not indicate an ultimate value judgment simply because it suggests a relative contemporary disadvantage. Women's programming is, indeed, an ultimate plus, more greatly to be recognized in the future than in the past. Unfortunately, however, it is women who are seeking to incorporate "male" values. Again, Marciano writes:

> The reality of the male-structured workplace is that the values associated with female socialization must be put aside. Yet the paradox is that gentleness, and the deference of civility, and more "humanistic" values for which women's company (outside of work) is valued by men. At the same time, the very ability to anticipate the wishes, needs, and reactions of others ("role taking") is found to promote female subordination in work and in marriage. (Marciano, 1981)

Women, clearly, are placed in an awkward position of having very productive interpersonal skills as a natural part of their socialization, skills valued in interpersonal relations, and, yet, not valued in the professional setting. Little wonder women face added stress in the power/sex roles of the modern business office.

Men, too, are limited by their early training and programming. In short, the literature I have read has indicated that men were taught to (1) be achievers, leaders, creators; (2) play "king on the mountain"; (3) have power in their sex role; (4) be aggressive; (5) be the sexual initiator; (6) die sooner; (7) seek stressful situations; (8) seek satisfaction primarily in their career; (9) not be open and expressive of feelings; (10) not cry; (11) be less touching and less touched; (12) enjoy the "dual standard"; (15) "perform" sex; (16) use others like things; (17) be "protectors" of females; (18) seek females

who are devoted; (19) dominate conversations; (20) interrupt more; (21) show less interest in others; (22) be less nurturing of others; (23) tend to speak intellectually rather than personally; (24) speak for longer periods of time; (25) etc. Sex-role images relatively consistently portray males as independent, aggressive, task-oriented, stoic, objective, self-disciplined, analytical, unsentimental, authoritative, competitive, domineering, blunt, boastful, and prone to violent outbursts. Females are seen more often as dependent, passive, nonaggressive, noncompetitive, interpersonally oriented, empathetic, supportive, indecisive, subjective, sentimental, and emotional.

Inge Boverman and associates asked males and females to describe behaviors typical of each sex. A lenghty list of adjectives was obtained. The following are samples of stereotypes supported by both male and female respondents:

FEMALES	MALES
not at all aggressive	very aggressive
very dependent	very independent
very emotional	not at all emotional
very submissive	very dominant
not at all competitive	very competitive
very illogical	very logical
not at all ambitious	very ambitious
very strong need for security	very little need for security
easily expresses tender feelings	does not express tender feelings easily

(Boverman et al., 1970)

Boverman then asked a group of psychotherapists to identify qualities they associated with the "healthy" male and the "healthy" female. Their lists support the hypothesis that the more closely a person's behavior approximates the sex-appropriate stereotype, the more likely it is that the person will be perceived as an emotionally healthy individual. Additionally, therapists were asked to describe what they considered to be "adult-like" behavior. The adjectives were almost identical with a male in our society. According to this study, then, a healthy adult almost is synonymous with a male in our society. In other words, male is normal. And, if a male is normal, female is not. Stereotypically, women were not seen as "adult like" and, in fact, were described in terms of emotional instability. Linguistically, females are pictured as being more likely than males to use questions, as opposed to assertions, and to use more intensifying adjectives and adverbs than males. Females are found to use more words implying emotion and more references to self--self disclosure (Eakins, 1978).

Sandra Bem, among others, advances the concept of androgyny. In addition to masculine males and feminine females, she posits that there are feminine males, androgynous males, undifferentiated males, masculine females, androgynous females, and undifferentiated females. Her writings suggest that psychological sex (gender) is a better predictor of

behavior than anatomical sex. She finds that only androgynous subjects (those scoring high on both masculine and feminine traits) display a high level of "masculine" independence as well as a high level of "feminine" nurturance (Adler et al., 1980). The androgynous individual may well be less restricted in some behaviors and better able to adapt to situations that require characteristics presumed of one sex or the other. Ruth A. Brandwein added:

> It (androgyny) suggests that both women and men may express the full range of human attitudes and behaviors without being labeled masculine women or effeminate men. That is, women should be freed to be logical, assertive, and direct, and men should be freed to be sensitive, nurturant, and caring. Thus, the implication for macro practice is that both men and women should be taught to be facilitators and enablers as well as advocates and adversaries (Brandwein, 1980).

To the degree that this statement is true, then the antiquated sex-role stereotypes of the business world are in need of considerable rethinking, to say the least.

Nonverbally, sexual power struggles are communicated in the office. Men who operate an informal "good ole boys" club, even unintentionally, freeze many creative female executives out of the decision-making process. The stop at the bar where decisions are made--after dropping off the female member of the team--is a case in point. Being informed the next day how a situation will be handled is no consolation for the female executive. Being denied the handball club access to Mr. Big is another example of subtle sexual power abuses in the modern corporate office.

With abuse of sexual power, additional safeguards are needed. Many organizations have adopted sexual harassment policy statements. Included in the definition of "sexual harassment" are such actions as the following:

> Sex-oriented verbal "kidding" or abuse.
> Subtle pressure for sexual contact.
>
> Physical contact such as patting, pinching, or constant brushing against another's body.
>
> Expressed or insinuated requests or demands for sexual favors, accompanied by implied or overt promises of preferential treatment or threats concerning an individual's employment status.
>
> Verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.
>
> (Central Missouri State University, 1983)

Such unwelcome sexual advances, requests, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature do constitute sexual harassment when

(1) Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or education.

(2) Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting the individual.

(3) Such conduct has the purpose of effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.

(Central Missouri State University, 1983)

Such situations may be subject to informal and formal actions. Obviously, these situations are extreme, though not uncommon, and are indicative of sexual power plays in the office. Each organization should have an explicit policy regarding such activity and an educational program to clarify the policy or the organization for all employees. Legal ramifications are significant.

Some of the problems created by stereotypic responses to gender in the office setting are obvious. In most cases women are placed at a distinct disadvantage. Some difficulties may not be so obvious. At any rate, it is important for all of us to realize that the loser in all this is the organization and, indeed, national productivity as a whole. Time drained from any productive activity cannot be reclaimed. As Forbes and Piercy say, "It is clear that, at present, women have relatively little power at the top levels in the U.S. corporations" (Forbes & Piercy, 1983). This is tragic when one compares the review of literature presented by Baird and Bradley regarding valued management skills such as conflict management, persuasion, leadership, foresight, concern for organizational goals, warmth, helpfulness, affiliation, etc., all, on balance, acknowledged to be primarily female skills (Baird & Bradley, 1979).

Specifically, one of their conclusions should be considered seriously by all executives: ". . . female managers may be more effective supervisors than the male managers seen in this investigation" (Baird & Bradley, 1979). Unfortunately, as my former colleague Gay Wakefield concluded in her dissertation, ". . . it is possible that males overestimate their power and females underestimate theirs" (Wakefield, 1983). While it is unlikely that much will change rapidly, it is time for professionals of both sexes to recognize the sheer folly of perpetuation of counterproductive gender stereotypes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

As one who has worked under the administration of men and women and directed the activities of both men and women in a professional setting, I call for change in how sexual power is used in business, industry, education, and government. It is time that the interpersonal values of female socialization be recognized for their inherent worth in

all sectors. Women must be rewarded for their humanizing values. No longer can management allow itself to hide behind a wall of ignorance regarding what is happening to productivity in organizations replete with sex/power struggles. Specific suggestions for remedies to problems of inappropriate power perceptions in organizations include:

(1) Training programs with the goal of consciousness raising (awareness) of the problems of power perceptions in the specific organizations.

(2) Employment analysis of firms' hiring, placement, and advancement policies focusing upon comparative worth data for each management and executive position. Recognition of the implications of time in rank, salary, span of control data, etc. may imply problems and solutions for the organization.

(3) Intentional mentoring programs by the organization and networking efforts by male and female manager/executive candidates.

(4) Having intermediate range divisional goals to increase the number of managerial/executive women integrated into the organization and periodic reviews of the target objectives.

(5) Skills training for all manager/executive career development personnel in the organization focusing upon skills shown to relate to effective human relations and conflict management.

Together, the genders can accomplish much in organizations. The gender mix in executive ranks is changing rapidly, and primary socializations of both sexes can and should complement each other. Male and female managers can learn from one another many communication, problem-solving, and perception skills which encourage the "gender partnership."

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